



## Citizens Advisory Committee – Region 3

**Date:** Wednesday, Aug. 9, 2023  
**Time:** 5:30 p.m.  
**Location:** Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Region 3 headquarters  
1400 S. 19<sup>th</sup> Ave., Bozeman  
Visitor conference room

**CAC members:** Jared Brown, Michael Cavaness, Cindy Christophersen, Jeremy Fadness, Michael Hansen, Jeff Johnson, Mel Kotur, Cara McGary, Logan Miller, Trevor Nichols, Herman Pede, Bill Pratt, Mark Savinski, Richard Schwalbe, Paul Siddoway, Dave Stratton, Whitney Tilt, Betsey Weltner, Myrtle Woosley, Joel Worth

**Fish & Wildlife Commissioner:** Susan Kirby Brooke

**State Parks and Recreation Board member:** Russ Kipp

### AGENDA

**5:30 p.m.** Dinner (provided)

**6 p.m.** Welcome and opening remarks

- Marina Yoshioka, regional supervisor
- Logan Miller, CAC chair

Discussion/updates

- Update on trout in southwestern Montana (postponed)
- Elk management plan update

CAC roundtable

**8 p.m.** Adjourn



## MEETING MINUTES

### Members present:

- Logan Miller
- Mark Savinski
- Richard Schwalbe
- Joel Worth
- Dave Stratton
- Michael Cavaness
- Herman Pede
- Bill Pratt
- Paul Siddoway
- Cindy Christophersen
- Mel Kotur
- Trevor Nichols

### FWP staff present:

- Marina Yoshioka
- Warren Hansen
- Adam Pankratz
- Linnaea Schroeer
- Martin Holtmeyer
- Morgan Jacobsen
- Deb Lindsey

### Elk Management plan update (Warren Hansen)

Our elk populations in Region 3 are pretty robust. We didn't see any impact from this past winter, which was long, on the elk population. Mule deer and pronghorn were more heavily impacted from the winter. The Madison Valley is where our pronghorn population was most impacted – about 30 percent mortality. We'll look at adjusting hunting license numbers in some areas. Bighorn sheep were also affected in the Hebgen area.

We have wildlife plans for just about all of our game species. Our last elk plan was written in 2005, so there's been a big effort to revise/update that plan. We work heavily with our biologists to determine what a healthy population should be, and we also work with sportsmen, landowners and other users to weigh in on how many elk should be in a particular herd. That eventually boils down to a number for how many should be in a given area. That also leads to objectives for how many fawns/calves, bulls/bucks, how much time should they spend in different areas, what type of game damage would we expect to see, etc. That all gets put into



the plan, which goes out for public comment. We also do an environmental analysis on that plan as well.

We've been working on updating this plan for about a year now. The draft plan and environmental assessment were out for public comment recently, and we received a lot of public comments. Region 3 received about 150 public comments. Our biologists are now looking through those comments to determine if anything needs to change in the proposed plan. In September, we'll finalize the biologists' recommendations, and the draft plan will be presented to the agency director in October, and if/when he signs off on it, we'll have a new elk management plan in December.

This is the plan that outlines what to do when biologists observe elk numbers that are higher or lower than what's expected or desired. It also provides some wiggle room for local decision-making and adjustments.

If you're interested in annual flight surveys and other updates from local biologists, you can request to be put on their distribution list for that information.

(How flexible is the plan?)

Elk management units have objective ranges, within which elk numbers are acceptable. If elk numbers are above or below that objective range, hunting license numbers or regulations for the general license can be adjusted to increase or lessen hunting harvest impact on the population. Season dates are set by the commission, not the plan or the biologist.

(Where do we stand in terms of how many elk we have and what we can handle?)

Most of our elk populations in Region 3 are over objective. For the most part, we're not increasing those objectives. In fact, we're recommending reduced population objectives in some places.

In many parts of the state, we could sustain more game animals, but there's not a social tolerance for increased game populations in many areas.

Region 3 has more elk and mule deer than other regions. There's also more public land than other areas, such as eastern Montana. Thus Region 3 sees most of the elk harvest in the state.

(Is CWD a consideration in the new elk plan?)

It's not. We've only had two elk test positive for CWD. It's more prevalent in mule deer and whitetail deer. We don't know enough about CWD in elk enough to manage it yet. We know more about how it affects deer at population levels.



CAC feedback on the plan:

- The plan seems to prioritize habitat and migration, which is great.
- Concerns about options of going to a general tag in limited-draw units when the population is over objective. Harvest in those over-objective areas should be focused on cows.

Agenda adjustment: Due to time constraints, we'll hold the fish presentation in another meeting in the near future so we can discuss it comprehensively and have fisheries staff available to present it.

CAC roundtable:

Logan Miller: In general, in the Dillon, Ruby area, we're having an unbelievable year for rain and productive season. We're gearing up for fall, we'll have some game damage hunts and CWD stuff.

Mark Savinski: A lot of questions I'm getting are on the fish issues. But things are looking really good in the Ruby Valley. Lots of rain, no big fires. I'll have more comments when we talk about fish.

Richard Schwalbe: Plant life in Big Sky is lush. Flowers are out a lot longer. We continue to work on a river access site in the resort district across from the school.

Dave Stratton: We got 7-plus inches of rain in the past month, and Butte typically gets 12 inches in a year. Occasionally seeing bad behavior from hunters. A refresher course or communication effort on hunter education would be beneficial to help people remember common regulations that are violated (hunter orange, road access, etc.)

Michael Cavaness: not enough education out there about how to minimize impact while recreating on rivers. Human waste, campfires, littering are all issues we're seeing from people who either don't know or don't care. Need more communication on etiquette, as well as ADA access.

Paul Siddoway: No question the decline in fisheries in southwest Montana is a big deal. I'm thankful more people are aware of it. Some outstanding solutions have been brought forward, including the changes that the commission adopted on spawning closures, bait restrictions, etc. That being said, I think we need to push that a little bit further that in order for these studies to be valid, we need a section of the river to be closed. A lot of people have been asking about that. Many folks would prefer to see closures instead of a bunch of new regulations. On Hunter



Education, it's so important, it may be time to have a budget for people to teach (paid instructors).

Cindy Christophersen: Vegetation in the elkhorns and Canyon Ferry is lush and green. I watch antelope a lot and we do not have the antelope on the flats this year. We've had such a great spring, but we just don't have the antelope that we have had in previous years. Got a lot of complaints about the moose, goat, sheep draw error.

Mel Kotur: I wanted to bring up something that came out of the legislative session, I believe it was SB280, on bird dog training licenses. I'm glad to see that we took some action on that because there were a lot of professional trainers coming from out of state to do that previously. As a member of two gun-dog associations, there's a certain amount of confusion about how it works. Some information about how it works would be good. But having that license in place gives us a foot in the door to have some control, but more certainty on the rules would be good.

Trevor Nichols: I think there's some confusion on what people should have or shouldn't have on the bird dog training license. There's opportunity for communication on that. I was really pleased with a lot of the elk management plan. I have a lot of concern about fisheries in southwest Montana. People are concerned. The more information we can get, the more we can communicate with people. Our fisheries staff are doing a fantastic job. Kudos on the conservation license rule change. It's a wonderful thing.